

Секция 1
Информационно-коммуникационные
технологии в вузах

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BLENDED APPROACH FOR RUSSIAN AS SECOND
LANGUAGE GRAMMAR TEACHING

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The particular application of computer-aided technologies for Teaching of Grammar of Russian as Second Language has already given phenomenal results, while being applied at the United States Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning.

Today, computer-aided learning technologies are commonly assumed to be primarily used in distance learning. At the same token, the traditional classroom needs them even more when it comes to foreign language teaching. Moreover,

Obviously, the three single challenges in modern teaching of any foreign language are:

- to identify the target audience (college, business, government, seniors, adults, defense, etc.) and its learning readiness;
- to tailor language programs to the specific need of the student;
- to assess the learners' progress for needed adjustments.

Computer-based technologies seem to be an excellent aide in all three tasks. Today, every government body uses assessment tools such as ILR or ACTFL scales. No other tool, but computer-based technologies, is able to individualize learning objectives for several students in the same classroom to every student's needs.

This is the very reasons why more and more educators apply blended approaches to their face-to-face teachings. Furthermore, ones' successes encourage others.

To get the Marine Corps culturally-prepared for future deployments, USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning trains the troops about different regions of the globe. The Marines need to be ready for crises, like Haiti or Indonesia, or mutual operations with foreign governments anywhere. The Marines never really know where they are going to be. In the aftermath of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, their potential to adapt to local residents is considered to be justly decisive to the success of their mission.

Professional Solutions LLC is a USMC contractor for the language programs at the Quantico base in Virginia. As its staff members, both authors develop and deliv-

er foreign language courses for the United States Marine Corps. Rima Houmani is the Language Officer for the program. She is also an Arabic and French Instructor herself. Igor Irkho is a Russian Instructor. He is also an adjunct professor of Vaughn College of Aeronautics and Technology.

The Russian as Second Language course appeared at the Quantico base in Virginia at the beginning of July of 2010. Initially, this course was a traditional, so-called "talk-and-chalk" course with some usage of audio and video materials in the target language. However, two features of the course made changes unavoidable. They were the characteristics of the target audience and features of the Russian language.

First of all, the sixteen learners have a wide variety of introductory preparedness and learning styles in the classroom. All of them were post-graduates, who were recently recruited to the Marine Corps and whose professional waiting was delayed because of some technical issues. Their college majors ranged from mechanical engineering to creative writing. Two of them had taken few Russian courses before the class started.

Secondly, the uniqueness of the Russian grammar made this language so difficult to learn. Indeed, the Cyrillic alphabet is not as confusing as the Arabic one, for instance. The Russian vocabulary is greatly westernized as well; about dozen percent of Russian words are internationalisms such as coffee or taxi. However, complicated endings of the nouns and modifiers, which are affected by six cases and three genders, as well as applications and, especially, aspects of the verbs, individually conjugated to grammatical subjects have appeared twisting to the learners. Not taking into consideration French and Portuguese learners in this program, even learners of Arabic started speaking earlier than learners of Russian.

In November, after four months students were offered to take Russian DLPT5, a computer-based test for listening and reading comprehension. This test scored Russian learners 0.47 in reading, while those who learnt Arabic, which vocabulary is radically more complicated than the Russian one, scored 0.39.

After that result, the Russian grammar became the major target of the Marines' educators. This grammar was divided into three parts: (a) vocabulary, (b) predicate conjugations, and (c) grammatical case applications. Computer-aided technologies allowed (1) assessing the learners' stages of affairs in grammar, (2) identification of the troubled areas, (3) addressing those areas through computer-based quizzes, which were the major learning tool for the last weeks of the course.

In less than a month, the Russian learners improved their reading results by 67% and scored 0.78. This high effectiveness of computer-aided technologies in the face-to-face classroom prompted the authors to explore those technologies further.

After all, there is no doubt that computer-aided technologies are able to individualize and enhance learning processes. In foreign language teaching of adult learners, they are the only tool available.

Theoretically, teachers must tailor their teaching to the group of learners. Let us talk about the best case scenario for a second. All of learners have come from similar cultural backgrounds. They have similar learning styles and learning capacities. Finally, they have similar levels of preparedness. The teacher has an ability to access their state of affairs and has successfully identified the best teaching strategy. Every class member, including the teacher, shows up for every classroom session and has perfect conditions to successful learning. Every member has no health issues, family situations and stress concerns. Have you ever seen that particular classroom? Most likely, you have not. We neither.

Now, we are switching to the real classroom, in which adult learners study foreign languages. These learners are of different ages. They have different family statuses and personal situations. They come from different cultures. They request different learning paces. Finally, their starting portfolios differ greatly. One may have remarkably studied Spanish. Another took a couple of Russian classes. The third experiences something like a post-traumatic disorder after a failed French class. The fourth has never seen any foreign-language speaker in her life.

Next, the class starts. One excels in phonetics and another in grammar. One is faster in morphology and another is slower. The teacher's constant challenge is to make a decision whom to teach, what to teach and how to teach. If this very teacher cares about her students, of course.

Currently, the authors have explored or are exploring the following seven applications, which may have greatest impact particularly on the traditional classroom of adult learners of foreign languages, in the case of the authors, Arabic or Russian. They are (1) audition, (2) assessment, (3) individual objectives, (4) task rotation, (5) flextime and telecommuting, (6) participative management and conflict resolution, and, finally, (7) long-term benefit.

1. Audition

Obviously, audiovisual facilities are imperative for any foreign language learning. Computer-aided technologies may be more efficient than regular audiovisual systems in classrooms because of two important aspects. Computer-aided technologies are able to track students' activities and, consequently, adjust the original curriculum to the particular learner's needs. Plus, computer formats of audiovisual resources are more widespread and, accordingly, more convenient for learners. They can listen to those resources while driving or commuting, for instance.

2. Assessment

Computer-aided software has a wonderful potential to assess student's knowledge faster than any other technique. This very feature of computers makes those technologies so important for the classroom teacher. Instead of giving one comprehensive exam for a little while, the technologically-advanced teacher may give quizzes even every hour.

One more feature of computer-aided assessment may greatly help students themselves. Their results may be accessible for an extended period of time.

3. Individual objectives

Through computer-aided technologies, teachers may establish individual objectives for particular learners. Moreover, individual learners may establish their own leaning objectives if they need so.

For instance, medical doctor may emphasize medical terms. Someone who is going to marry a person from the target language background may emphasize everyday vocabulary. The great feature of computer-aided technologies is that they may, virtually, please everyone or almost everyone.

4. Task rotation

Computer-aided technologies may rotate teacher-learner tasks in the real classroom. Many traditional classroom leaders employ teamwork or task delegation. Computer-aided technologies allow making those processes traceable and, consequently, manageable.

5. Flextime and telecommuting

There is no classroom member without family and health issue. Computer-aided software may make those issues smoother for the learning process. If someone cannot attend a classroom session, she may be able to get some work done outside this classroom.

6. Participative management and conflict resolution

Usage of various Internet-based groups has already become a norm for better connection between class members. Regularly, teachers and students post announcements, as well as share course documents and/or materials online. At the same time, the opportunity to use discussion boards is, in our view, understudied regardless of the fact that discussion boards may obviously be used for participative establishment of class rules and procedures. Discussion boards seem to be a tool to prevent tensions before disciplinary interventions are needed.

7. Long-term benefit

At last, not at least, computer-aided technologies may have a long-term benefit. Let consider a learner who have studied some language before and wants to refresh her learning. If her previous course is still available, the learning process will be both easier and more efficient.

There are no doubts that possible influences of computer-aided technologies generally and computer-based conflict resolutions particularly must be further studied, blended approach is, most likely, the most effective single resource to enhance teaching of foreign languages even in traditional classrooms. The phenomenal success of its application for one of the most difficult areas to teach, which the Russian as Second Language grammar is, proves this fact.